



**WEBINAR**

**REFUGEE  
INTEGRATION  
POLICIES IN  
EASTERN AFRICA:  
LOCAL, NATIONAL  
AND GLOBAL  
PERSPECTIVES**

SUMMARY REPORT

JANUARY 2025



A GLOBAL NGO NETWORK  
FOR PRINCIPLED AND EFFECTIVE  
HUMANITARIAN ACTION

## Event Objectives

To strengthen peer exchange, collaboration, and collective action across ICVA's membership in East and Southern Africa and beyond through the following:

- In line with ICVA's ways of working, create an opportunity to connect members with a view to contribute to ICVA's global policy and advocacy work, and shape policy-making on refugee integration/durable solutions at regional and global levels.
- To create a space for members to exchange best practices in programmes, policy-making and influencing.
- To create a space for shared reflection on ways of engagement with decision-makers.

### Panelists:

- Paul Kithima, CEO, Bondeko Refugee Livelihoods Centre
- Phillip Ogonda, Programme Officer, Refugee Consortium of Kenya
- Peter Mugo Muriuki, Senior Legal Officer, UNHCR Regional Office for EHAGL
- Davina Said, Head of Forced Displacement, ICVA

## Key Themes and Discussions

### Context: Refugee Integration Policies in Eastern Africa post-GCR

The Global [Compact](#) on Refugees is the biggest symbol of the international community's political will around the concept of refugee burden sharing and responsibility sharing, and aims to enable host and refugee communities to access integrated services and to bring in multiple stakeholders in this effort.

Regional bodies in Eastern Africa have been instrumental in bringing about **policy and legal reform**. Thanks to [IGAD](#) and the East African Community ([EAC](#)), political declarations such as the [Munyonyo Declaration](#) on Durable Solutions for Refugees in East and Horn of Africa of 2023 have been made as a demonstration of political will and concerted regional protection by IGAD and EAC Member States in collaboration with [ICGLR](#) Member States. There has been a lot of policy generation from IGAD, though the challenge with IGAD policy is that it is declaratory but not enforceable. EAC policy on refugees might be slow coming but it is legally enforceable in the regional court (East African Court of Justice) and national courts (in EAC Member States). These steps towards regional protection policy generation are welcome: they are reinforcing the need to include refugees and to move to higher protection ideals. However, implementation challenges remain because true integration will require:

- Good identity documents for refugees.
- Uniform approach, which regional bodies have tried to recognise e.g. border points have machine readers for identification cards that are recognised across borders.
- Policy alignment across the regional bodies.

- **Political goodwill** - Authorities could be willing but politics against it e.g. in Tanzania after the government started the process of naturalisation of over 162,000 Burundian refugees in 2010 the politics didn't allow further naturalisation.

At the country level, there's recognition that host countries and the international community need to enhance the social economic inclusion of refugees. In Kenya, legal and policy developments have enabled refugees to access public services like health, education and business registration as well as financial services. They include:

- The Refugees Act 2021.
- Refugee Regulations.
- Gazette Notices issued by the national government e.g. September 2023 gazette notice that recognised refugee documents to enable socioeconomic integration.
- Shirika Plan, a government-led initiative supported by humanitarian actors which aims to promote refugee self-sufficiency and integration through an all-society approach which engages government, humanitarian agencies, the private sector, the civil society and also local communities. It prioritises support to host communities, especially through addressing resource pressures, and also fostering that shift from humanitarian to a developmental oriented model.
- At the County government level, there are development plans - KISED and GISED - that have been integrated into the county development plans of Turkana and Garissa. Nairobi County is now developing a strategy to ensure urban refugees are able to access county services.

However, there are hindrances in the region: even when the law is very generous in embedding refugees' free movement, the right to work, and aspects of social economic inclusion, sometimes practical and physical barriers exist that hinder the full realisation of refugee inclusion:

- **Administrative barriers:** Ethiopia's Refugee Proclamation allows refugees to work but only the employer can trigger the right by applying for a work permit on behalf of a refugee; in Tanzania, refugees can access seasonal work permits but it's upon the employer to seek out a possible employee and apply for the work permit, and even then the process of work permit application sometimes present an administrative barrier e.g. in Tanzania, the work permit is supposed to be embedded on a passport yet not many refugees have passports.
- **Freedom of movement restrictions:** When the freedom of movement has not been enhanced, even if the right to work and the possibilities of a work permit are embedded in law, the refugee will be stopped from, let's say, leaving the refugee camp because they have not been issued with the travel document e.g. in Kenya where refugees have to travel from the refugee camps in Northern Kenya to apply for work permits in the capital, Nairobi.

### **The Role of NGOs, Refugee-Led Organisations and Refugees in Policy Development:**

- Thought leadership and point of authority for evidenced-based recommendations for refugee policies.

- Given NGOs also work with refugees they're mandated to ensure that the policies are developed in line with regional and international legal instruments.
- NGOs organise public participation and are the bridge between refugees and lawmakers (e.g. RCK has organised trips to Kenya's refugee camps for lawmakers so parliament can see the people whose laws they are developing will impact and understand their lived experiences).
- Advocate for rights-based policies and organise stakeholder consultations to integrate diverse views among multi stakeholders as refugee protection is multi stakeholder and multi sectoral issue.
- Actionable advocacy agendas - breaking down legal provisions with actionable recommendations so stakeholders can understand how the laws and policies affect their sectors.

### Good Practices around NGO-led Refugee Policy Advocacy at Country and Regional Levels:

- Refugee problems are multisectoral and usually require an all-society approach resolving them. RCK has learned to apply a multi-stakeholder collaboration and advocacy approach: the organisation engages county and national government agencies including those with refugee-facing functions, UNHCR, academia, and refugee and host communities.
- The importance of training service providers on refugee protection.
- Evidence-based advocacy helps to bring out strong arguments for refugee inclusion as NGOs engage various actors (some examples of how RCK collaborates with academia in research, and collaborating with students in terms of debates which enables NGOs to pick out advocacy issues that we're able to then propagate or advocate for and then also. Examples from RCK's work include: a policy brief on Statelessness that is guiding NGO advocacy for the government to amend the Citizenship and Immigration Act and a comparative analysis of refugee status determination appeal processes.
- Engaging the private sector in the refugee conversation also ensures that they understand the issue and refugees' needs, and why they need to include refugees in their services and products.
- Documentation - policy brief on statelessness that's guiding RCK advocacy on amending the Citizenship Act.
- Engaging duty bearers and service providers to ensuring their understanding of their responsibilities and Refugee Laws so they can properly implement them.
- Inclusion of refugees in the development of policies.

### Barriers to the Implementation of Refugee Integration Policies: Are Refugee and Host Communities' Perspectives Aligned with Policy Makers' and Humanitarian Actors?

- **Barriers in government processes and bureaucracies in the implementation of policies:** despite having robust laws in the region, there's slow implementation.
- **Political resistance** – in some countries refugee protection falls under the line ministries that are in charge of national security (e.g. Ministry of Interior in Kenya) so it is

viewed from a national security lens which raises a risk of criminalising refugee protection.

- **Limited financing:** Dwindling funds - affects NGO activities and inadequate to meet refugees' needs such as where there's need for continued engagement with police and other duty bearers on refugee protection.
- **Refugees' views don't always align with policy makers':** Refugees expect full local integration means citizenship. For example: The Refugee Act of 2006 in Uganda and its Refugee Regulations of 2010 form a strong legal framework that define who a refugee is in Uganda in line with the 1951 Refugee Convention and its Protocol of 1967, and outlines the rights and obligations of refugees living in Uganda including access to education and healthcare, and protects refugees from forcible return. The law also promotes local integration – and that is where the disconnect lies because under the 1951 Convention, the last stage of integration is citizenship, something that the Uganda law does not envision. In which case, we should be talking about inclusion, not integration.
- **Fluidity of legal terminology in terms of application and usage:** Local integration in its fine legal sense is what is embedded in the 1951 Refugees Convention and alludes to naturalisation – it calls on States to naturalise or assimilate and facilitate the naturalisation of refugees. However, the term local integration is now being used to mean social cohesion and social inclusion or integration which alludes to peaceful co-existence and integrated services, having the host and refugee communities live together, do business together and becoming a melting pot of social interaction; there are also alternative solutions, which have cropped up because traditional local integration is very elusive (the last done in the region is the case of Tanzania naturalising 162,000 Burundians to become 'new Tanzanians').
- **Policy makers focus primarily on national security:** Governments are concerned about the economic impact of integration (e.g. local governments prioritise resource allocation while others see refugees as burdens rather than economic assets); host communities are concerned about competition for resources; the private sector's focus is on revenue generation.

### Global Opportunities of Relevance to Issues Raised in the Webinar:

There's an opportunity for ICVA to elevate and take discussion points from members and see how to advance at a global level. What actionable recommendations can be taken forward to elevate points made during the webinar:

- **Opportunities coming up this year include the UNHCR Standing Committee meeting:** ICVA coordinates NGO statements, with one statement focusing on this region.
- UNHCR-NGO regional consultations, which ICVA co-convenes, are an opportunity for members to raise some of the concerns around protection and raise awareness around legal frameworks on integration.
- **Stakeholder accountability on commitments to refugees and communities that host them in the framework of GCR:** This year is the High-Level Officials Meeting (HLOM) that takes place in December. In the lead-up to the HLOM there are opportunities for stock-taking around pledge implementation gaps and stock-taking in

terms of gathering good practices (good examples are coming from RCK and their all-society and multi-sectoral approach and evidence-based advocacy).

- ICVA is also focusing on the need to shift power to promote the influence of these global policy discussions so refugee leaders and RLOs can contribute (and address barriers).



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## Regional Hubs

### **Africa**

Nairobi, Kenya  
Dakar, Senegal

### **Asia-Pacific**

Bangkok, Thailand  
Islamabad, Pakistan

### **MENA**

Amman, Jordan

### **Latin America**

Guadalajara, Mexico  
(Coordination)

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